Impact of cultural dimensions in distributed software teams

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The world is becoming increasingly distributed

Software teams grow across geographical boundaries as the software they build grows in size and complexity.
Priit Liivak

12 years in Nortal covering various roles:
- Programmer
- Architect
- Team Lead
- Evangelist
- Head of Engineering

- I don’t find the word “programmer” offensive
- I don’t mind pineapple on a pizza

- @priitliivak
Nortal operates in more than 20 countries and employs over 750 specialists who carry out high-impact projects across the globe.
Motivation
Dilemma

Our friend needed to leave early and passed a code review with an obvious bug in it. This caused financial damage to the company and his manager is asking us, if he really reviewed the code. What do we do?

1. Lie for the sake of friendship
2. Tell the truth against his interests
Models of Cultural Dimensions
Models of Cultural Dimensions

- Geert Hofstede’s 6 dimensions of national culture
  › Model developed from large survey study conducted between 1967-1973
  › 117,000 employees from IBM worldwide subsidiaries

- Trompenaars' model of national culture – 7 dimensions
  › Developed by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner
  › 46,000 managers and organization employees from 43 countries
The 7 dimensions of national culture

By Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner
Dilemma

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2. Tell the truth against his interests
Dilemma

Our friend has caused an accident driving too fast in his car and hit a pedestrian. Our friend is summoned to court, as are we, as a witness to testify about his driving speed. What do we do?

1. Lie for the sake of friendship
2. Tell the truth against his interests
Universalism versus particularism

• Universalistic cultures
  › Laws, rules and obligations have high importance
  › Fairness and equality play a big role

• Particularistic cultures
  › Relationships are valued more than rules
  › Right and wrong depends on the circumstances
Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner model

1. Universalism versus particularism
2. Individualism versus communitarianism
3. Specific versus diffuse
4. Neutral versus emotional
5. Achievement versus ascription
6. Internal direction versus outer direction
7. Sequential time versus synchronous time
Sequential and Synchronous time
The 6 dimensions of national culture

By Geert Hofstede
Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

1. Power Distance Index
2. Individualism vs. Collectivism
3. Masculinity vs. Feminity
4. Uncertainty Avoidance Index
5. Long Term Orientation vs. Short Term Normative Orientation
6. Indulgence vs. Restraint
Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

Short Term vs Long Term Orientation

- **Short Term Orientation**
  - High pride in own country
  - Reporting of quarterly results
  - Choosing the extreme is more common
  - Protection of one’s face is important

- **Long Term Orientation**
  - Learning from other countries
  - Market share and long term profits
  - Common sense and choosing middle way
  - Face considerations common but seen as a weakness
Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

Power Distance Index

- **Low Power Distance Index**
  - Children learn independence
  - Subordinates expect to be consulted about their work
  - Innovations are spontaneous

- **High Power Distance Index**
  - Children learn respect
  - Subordinates expect to be told, what to do
  - Innovations come about only when supported by the hierarchy

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Power Distance Index</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Lithuania</td>
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<td>India</td>
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Hofstede’s cultural dimensions

Uncertainty Avoidance

• Low Uncertainty Avoidance
  › Teachers may say “don’t know”
  › There should be no more rules than needed
  › Unpredictability is normal part of every project

• High Uncertainty Avoidance
  › Teachers are expected to have all the answers
  › Everything is ritualized
  › Very detailed analysis and plans are expected

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[Graph showing countries and their Uncertainty Avoidance scores: China (30), Norway (50), Lithuania (65), Italy (75), Serbia (92), Japan (92)]
Stereotyping trap
Summary
Questions
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